

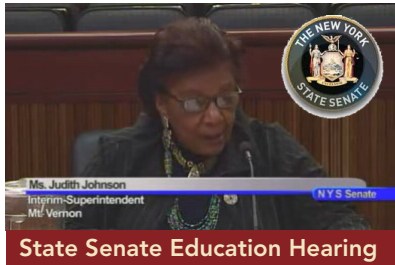
# WHAT'S GOING ON

around Mount Vernon City Schools



▶ A PUBLICATION OF THE MOUNT VERNON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

WINTER 2014: ISSUE 3



On November 13, 2013, Judith Johnson testified in Albany at the **The Regents Reform Agenda: "Assessing" Our Progress Purpose** with the intent to review the impact and effectiveness of recent state education reforms.

*"One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized, cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered."*

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.  
1929 - 1968



*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."*

NELSON MANDELA  
1918 - 2013

## SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

# KEEP MOVING FORWARD

## Our Past Gives Us Strength, Our Future Gives Us Hope

With the majority of Mount Vernon's population facing the challenges of economic struggle, today the odds of achieving success are unfortunately low. As a community do we all share the hope for living the American dream? We must continue to move forward with determination and focus because the success stories are real and inspiring. Where would they be right now had they not recognized that higher education put them on one of the safest paths to the American dream? Would they have otherwise been another life claimed by collateral damage from crime? A young person losing hope with no goals or purpose? An involuntary victim of the grinding cycle of poverty?

We must share in the dedication to see young men and women beating the odds and grasping the life-changing opportunity that will change the course of their lives forever. Americans cheer for underdogs because their successes give us all hope that we can do better. But underdogs need a level playing field on which to compete. And all of us need to reject the lie that education is for the privileged few — it has to be for anyone willing to work hard enough to achieve their dreams.

Judith Johnson  
Interim Superintendent

## ARE THE CHILDREN WELL?

### THE STORY OF THE MASAI

In all of the tribes in Africa, few have warriors more fearsome or more cunning than the Masai of Kenya. It is perhaps surprising then, to learn the traditional greeting among Masai warriors. One warrior would always say to another, "Kesserian Ingera", which in Swahili means, "Are the children well?"

This is still the traditional greeting among the Masai, acknowledging the high value of the Masai for the well-being of children. Even modern Masai with no children of their own always give the traditional answer, "All the children are well" meaning of course that peace and safety prevail — that the priorities of protecting the young and powerless are in place, that Masai society has not forgotten its reason for being and its responsibilities. "All the children are well" means, that life is good. It means that the daily struggles of existence do not preclude proper care for the young.



FEBRUARY 2014

MOUNT VERNON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Gerald Whiteside, *President* • Leonard Sarver, *Vice President* • Brenda L. Crump • Dr. Seringe Gningue  
Elias S. Gootzeit • Rosemarie Jarosz • Adriane Saunders • Michelle Walker • Frances Wynn

[www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org)

## 2013 ENROLLMENT

Over 8,000 reasons for us to be hopeful about the future.

GRADE	ENROLLMENT
Pre- K.....	325
K.....	675
01.....	703
02.....	681
03.....	697
04.....	619
05.....	597
06.....	600
07.....	561
08.....	575
09.....	804
10.....	548
11.....	478
12.....	489
<b>Total.....</b>	<b>8362*</b>

\*Does not include the 407 Mount Vernon Special Education Students being educated at other locations.

# STATE OF OUR SCHOOLS



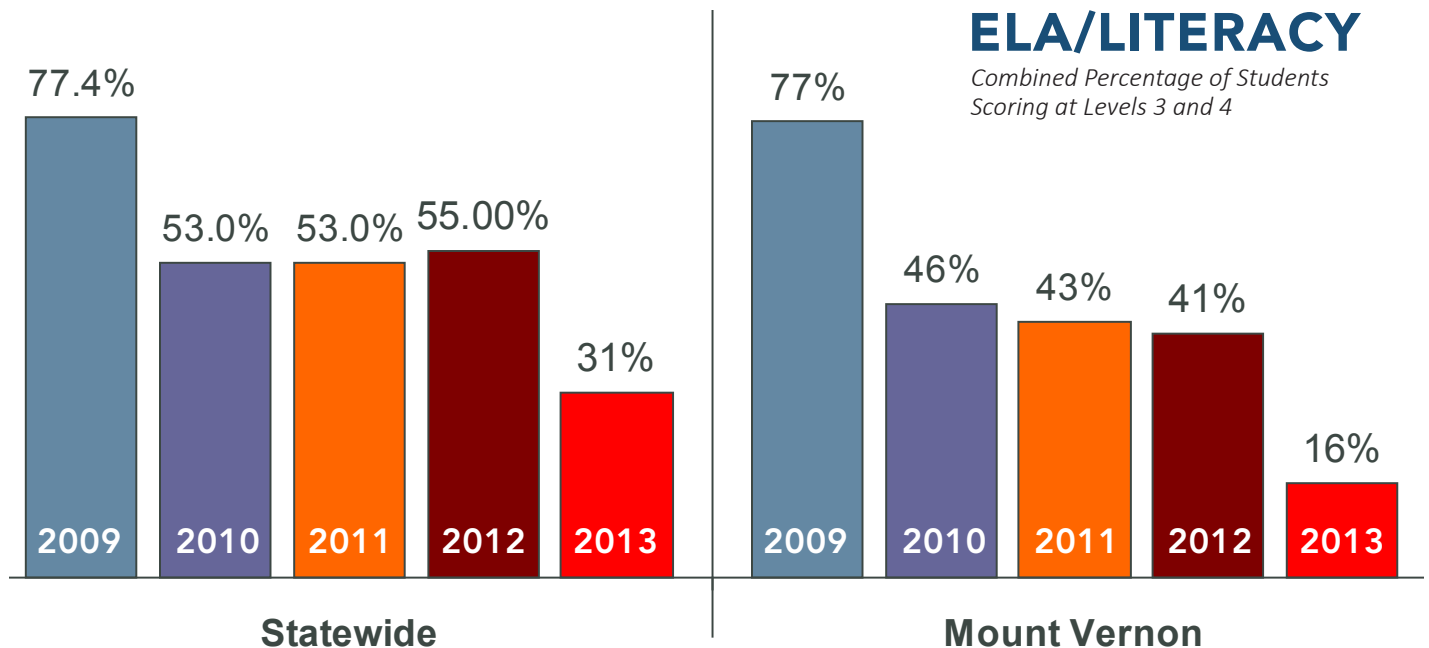
The Mount Vernon City School District was featured in the winter edition of McRel's *Changing Schools* magazine. Heith Hein highlights McRel's work with Mount Vernon and how continuous improvement is helping all to focus squarely on the needs of its students. Download: [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org) or visit [www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org).

## Are we preparing students for our present or their future?

The challenges of finding ways to close "test score gaps" among groups of students and to better prepare people for the real world are both urgent and very real. The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college, careers and adult life.

With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. In Mount Vernon, our education system must be accountable for ensuring all students, regardless of their socio-economic status, are successful graduates capable of success with motivation and inspired to see the connection between school and the rest of their lives. With the structures, processes, and attitudes the district has put in place over the past 10 months, the Mount Vernon City School District has renewed its belief in itself, its students, and the possibility that everyone in Mount Vernon will get the education they deserve.

## GRADES 3-8 ELA ASSESSMENT RESULTS: 2009 – 2013



## What is the State Education Department's response to the 2013 Assessment Results?

State Education Commissioner John King emphasized that the results do not reflect a decrease in performance for schools or students. The new assessments are a better, more accurate tool for educators, students, and parents as they work together to address the rigorous demands of the Common Core and college and career readiness in the 21st century.

### COMMON CORE LEADERSHIP



Dr. Gayle White Wallace and Frank Gallo, Standards Administrators in Curriculum & Instruction for Elementary and Secondary Schools respectively.



### How has the Common Core improved the overall classroom experience?

Student curriculum continues to be aligned with the learning standards necessary in both math and ELA/literacy. The dynamics of the classroom have changed. You can hear and see the engagement among students during class discussions and group work. Students are understanding, debating, questioning, and challenging each other's thinking. In a more collaborative culture, students are examining the world around them with increased interest and attention.

Our schools have started using an innovative diagnostic assessment called i-Ready® for students in grades K-12. i-Ready Diagnostic and Instruction is an online, interactive learning environment designed to assess students and then provide individualized instruction based on each student's unique needs. The exciting format and engaging content, as well as the Study Buddies and other interesting, contemporary characters, draw in students right away.

The i-Ready experience builds students' investment in their learning by giving them real-time feedback on their progress in each skill. As students complete each assignment successfully, they earn credits that they can use to play games. i-Ready Diagnostic and Instruction also provides opportunities to learn both at school and at home.

### Longfellow Elementary School



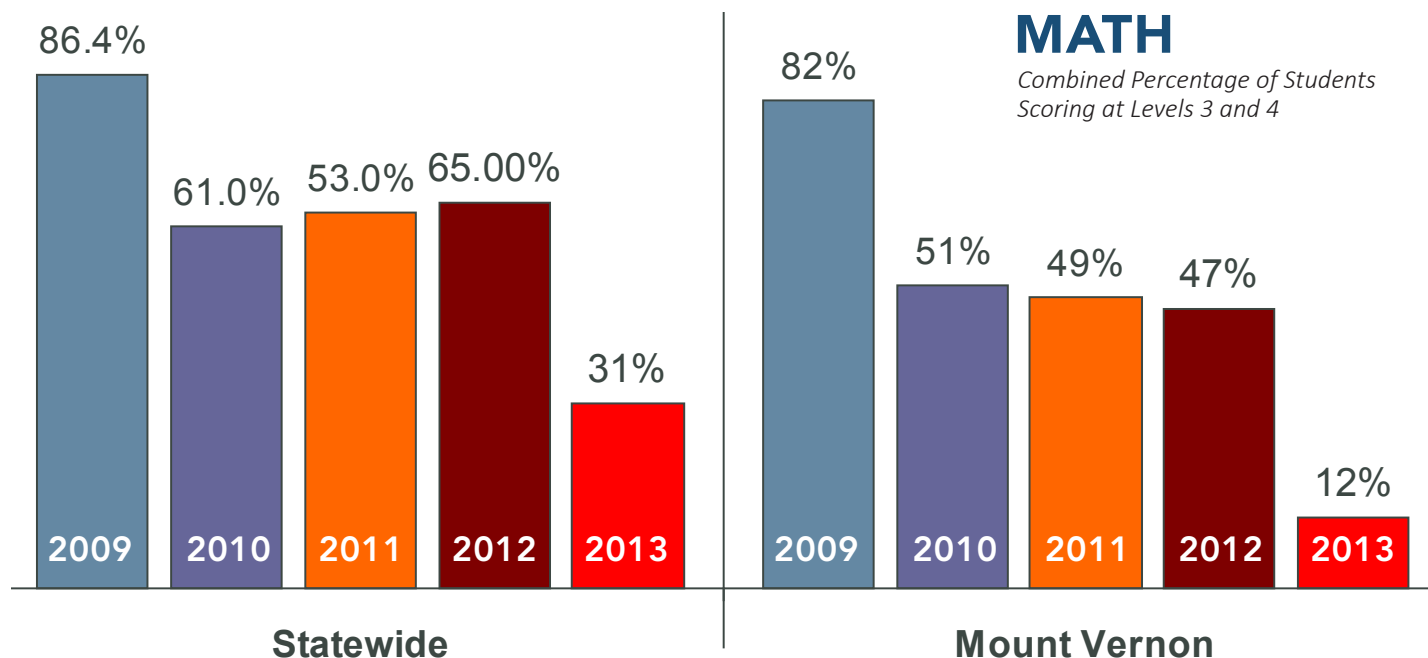
Fourth graders perform a multiplication fluency drill called "Rolling" with their principal.

### Lincoln Elementary School



On Family Math Night, families play and learn all the ways in which math is part of our everyday lives.

## GRADES 3-8 MATH ASSESSMENT RESULTS: 2009 – 2013



In 2010, cut scores changed, but the standards and scale remained the same.

In 2013, the standards, scale, and cut scores changed to measure the Common Core.



## WE LOVE TO READ

### Pennington Elementary School



A special holiday guest, Dr. Seuss's The Grinch, shares stories with students and families at the Pajama Night Scholastic® Bookfair event.

### Holmes Elementary School



Family Fun Night with students reading books and sharing their love of reading with their principal.

## EARLY LITERACY INITIATIVE UPDATE

### What are we doing to create greater support for young readers?

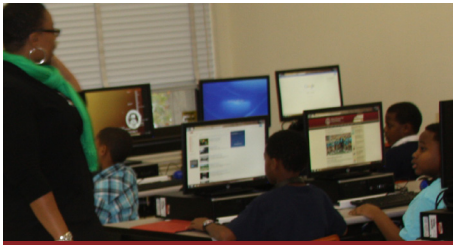
We are focused on teaching every child to read for understanding before they enter the third grade. It's the year that students move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". The books students are expected to master are no longer simple primers but fact-filled texts in subject areas like science and social studies. If a student hasn't mastered literacy in the early years of kindergarten through second grade (K-2), then it is at this moment we see children fall behind, and for most of them the achievement gap could continue to grow.

**LITERACY SUPPORT:** Early Literacy Specialists have been hired to provide enrichment, acceleration, tutorial support for all K-2 students in need of additional help and support. Early Literacy Teaching Assistants have also been hired to provide push-in support to all Grade K-1 classes.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** We have provided all K-2 teachers with intensive professional development from the Core Knowledge Professional Development Team on the theory, practice, and implementation of the Core Knowledge Curriculum. A partnership with SWBOCES, provides ongoing training for teachers in the areas of Interactive Writing and Evidence Based Questioning. All K-2 teachers are receiving Google Nexus® tablets to support the implementation of the Core Knowledge Program. All K-2 teachers receive continuous professional development in the Core Knowledge Program, as well as best practices and strategies to support Common Core Learning Standards. For more information on Common Core Learning Standards, please visit [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).

## WE LOVE TO LEARN

### Traphagen Elementary School



With all schools being updated with new computers and SmartBoards®, this media center teacher engages students with online research.

### Columbus Elementary School



This school principal demonstrates the latest teaching innovations for use in educating students utilizing applications from the iPad® to SmartBoard®.

### Mount Vernon Children Hope for Peace, Love, and Understanding



One of the most enduring lessons Nelson Mandela taught us was to reflect on his belief that "there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children". In December, the children who sit on the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council shared their hopes for more compassion and peace in every aspect of their lives.

### Grimes Elementary School



The Interim Superintendent catches a fourth grade class of students in action solving math problems using the box method.

### Hamilton Elementary School



The principal and staff hosted a fire safety assembly for students and their families to review helpful fire prevention and survival tips in time for the holidays.

## MEASURING OUR JOURNEY FORWARD

### How do we determine if our education goals are being met?

Assessment is an integral part of instruction. It determines whether or not our efforts are succeeding. A clear understanding of assessment results influences future decisions about grades, placement, advancement, instructional needs, and curriculum.



### SCHOOLNET®: OUR DATA DASHBOARD

We have recently started to use the award-winning Schoolnet Suite of data-driven education software as a unified solution to align student assessment, curriculum and instruction; guide collaborative, data-informed discussion; and enable targeted instruction for every student. [www.schoolnet.com](http://www.schoolnet.com)

The Schoolnet suite integrates the following data sources for comprehensive evaluation:

**eSchool Plus®** This student information system allows for the efficient recording of student demographic information, attendance, grades, transcripts, and other data. Digital report cards and Home Access Center are available through this system. This year a new reporting tool called Cognos was released to school staff.

**iReady®** This is a computer-based evaluation system allowing for a deeper understanding of student's strengths and needs in English and Math. Teachers utilize the iReady© adaptive computer-based assessment for identifying the progress and specific needs of students in grades K-12. [www.i-ready.com](http://www.i-ready.com)

**My Learning Plan®** In support of the strategic goals for maintaining a quality workforce, this tracking system manages professional development scheduling and activities for all educators and staff. [www.mylearningplan.com](http://www.mylearningplan.com)

**McREL Power Walkthrough®** This administrative walkthrough tool gauges the effectiveness of classroom implementation of Common Core Standards. [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

**Naviance®** A diverse college and career readiness program helping to connect student academic achievement with post-secondary goals and options. [www.naviance.com](http://www.naviance.com)

**Teachscape®** This rating tool is used by school principals to evaluate teacher ability to optimize student engagement in the classroom. [www.teachscape.com](http://www.teachscape.com)

### How will technology innovations support the creation of high performing school systems?

Today, the newest set of tools are becoming more and more present in Mount Vernon. The digital push in education aims to go far beyond gadgets to transform the very nature of the classroom, turning the teacher into a guide instead of a lecturer, wandering among students who learn at their own pace on Internet-connected devices. Interactive whiteboards and mobile technology can be seen being incorporated into the learning experience of students all around Mount Vernon schools.

Ongoing technology upgrades are taking place across the district. With the digitizing of records and a streamlined equipment tracking system. The Board of Education has also made great strides to introduce ways in which it can reduce paper costs, free-up building space, and provide more efficient access to data and resources. Our next newsletter issue will focus on the recent advancements in technology.

## DRIVEN TO ACHIEVE

### MOUNT VERNON HIGH SCHOOL



### INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS

Students attended the Annual UN Conference at Fairfield University where it held its annual Model UN High School Conference. A total of 14 high schools participated in the conference from the Tri-State area. Twelve of our students were invited to participate in the program.



### COMMUNITY DRIVE

A 'Super Community Blood Drive' was held in the small gym of Mount Vernon High School on November 20. The blood drive was sponsored by the National Honor Society (Chapter 95), in collaboration with the New York Blood Center.



### RECORD BREAKERS

Boys Varsity Track team scored No. 2 time in the country at the Sprint Medley Relay in Providence, Rhode Island over the winter holiday break. The foursome of Robert Romney, Cody Housen, Rai Benjamin and Joshua Beazer. Rai Benjamin earned the State and Federation titles in the 300 meters at a blazing speed of 33.84.



### KNIGHT VICTORIES

Mount Vernon's boys basketball team (18-1) got a small measure of revenge against New Rochelle on with a 46-40 quarterfinal victory. They then went on to beat Mahopac 43-40. The Knights defeated Spring Valley with a final score of 47 - 39. Congratulations to the Section 1 Class AA State Champions.



## 7 THINGS Students need to do now to get ready



## Parent Tips: Planning for College and Career

At the beginning of high school, sit down with your child's teachers, counselor, or other advisors to discuss what it will take for your child to graduate. For the latest in NY State graduation diploma requirements, visit [www.mtvernoncsd.org/students](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org/students).

Parents should communicate often with their children and have a plan to ensure they are working in partnership to help make student aspirations a reality. This plan can include: an appropriate **course sequence**; appropriate **extracurricular activities**; and **acquiring experience in a particular field of interest**.

For more information, contact the Director of School Counseling at 914-665-5308.

## COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

### Senior Student Reports from the Halls of Thornton High School



BRIANNA NEAL  
Student Editor

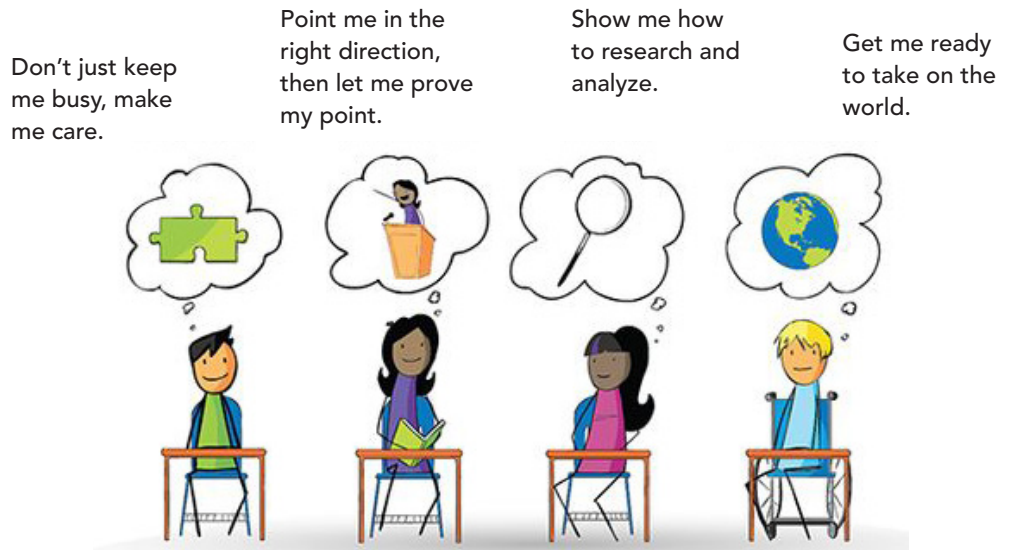
Typically once a student graduates from high school, parents and teachers hope they are prepared for college and have a solid career path in mind. But in reality, many students are uncertain of their path beyond high school. There doesn't seem to be enough time to adequately prepare. Even with honors and great grades, many parents and teachers don't realize how uneasy many students are about the two big 'C's' (college and career). So, I decided to ask our student body three simple, yet complex, questions concerning college and career readiness and revealed the following:

**What does it mean to be college and career ready?** "Following your dreams. Reaching the future. I think it means you're ready to go out in the world and work for what you want. If you want to be a doctor, you go to college and graduate college in order to reach your dreams. To be college and career ready to me is to be mature and mentally prepared. I don't know what to expect once I reach college, however, I know I'll be ready. I know I'll be ready because I'm mature enough to handle myself in a more rigorous environment."

**Do you think or feel that you are college and career ready?** "I have no idea what college I want to go to. But I do know two things - I want to be a professional actor and I have a long road ahead full of hard work and hard choices. I am uncertain about many things. What should I major in? Even though advanced placement courses in high school have prepped me for college and given me an idea of what my workload will be like, I fear the unknown."

**What would help you feel more college and career ready?** "I wish the school had a drama department. I would love to see more plays and even musicals in school so I could be better prepared for what to expect in a drama program. My school can become more college and career ready by taking us out on more college visits. Also by offering more job fairs and assisting us in achieving work experience or volunteer experience."

### How will the Common Core take student learning to new levels?



## SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING PLAN

### Why restructure now?

The Board of Education has decided it will move forward with implementing a comprehensive restructuring plan utilizing a multi-year approach in an effort to better serve diverse communities of children while also optimizing school building resources. This decision incorporates a number of strategic initiatives currently in place to improve the quality of education offered in Mount Vernon.

### Why has it been decided to move forward with a K-8 model?

In early 2013, various community stakeholders - including parents and educators - were invited to participate in a research effort aimed at identifying the feasibility of various grade configurations within elementary schools. After three months of research and review, the advisory group led by an expert facilitator, recommended a K-8 configuration utilizing variations of single buildings and paired campus buildings. With students in these combined settings staying together longer, the anticipated benefits included:

- Greater long-term student achievement
- Optimal distribution of school building and central office resources
- More comprehensive access to curriculum across grade levels
- Stronger sense of community within school buildings for students, parents, and staff

### What schools have been identified for the first phase and why?

Comprehensive restructuring will require a considerable amount of careful planning and thoughtful implementation. Lessons learned from the past restructuring efforts will support decisions going forward. With a promise and commitment to see this restructuring effort through for many years, the Board of Education has decided on a phased multi-year approach starting with four schools for the 2014/2015 school year. These schools include Pennington and Graham as single K-8 buildings (7th grade being added in the 2014/2015 school year and 8th grade in 2015/2016) and Longfellow Elementary and Middle as a paired school campus (PreK-5 and 6-8).



Jason Friedman of Educorp presents a study on the feasibility of K-8 on January 9th at Holmes Elementary School. The school community was invited to attend along with Board members and opening remarks by Judith Johnson. This presentation was recorded live and can be viewed on the following public access channels:

- Channel 6 for Time-Warner customers
- Channel 33 for FiOs customers



To download a copy of Jason Friedman's "Grade Configuration & School Restructuring Feasibility Study", visit the community section of the district website [www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org)



**As we transition to a "K-8" model, acceptance of a recent grant will provide additional funding for some technology upgrades.**

On Monday, February 26, 2014, Senator Klein and State Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson pose with students from Pennington Elementary School after announcing a \$100,000 direct aid grant to fund tablets, Smart Boards® and lap tops for middle schoolers at public schools in Mount Vernon.

## SCIENCE STARS

### Longfellow Middle School



High achieving Earth Science and Living Environment students are awarded Galileo replica telescopes.



## WE APPRECIATE

### BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATION



On February 27th, Nelson Mandela/Dr. Hosea Zollicoffer High School hosted a celebration of Black History with special guests and performances.

### A.B. Davis Middle School



Students were recognized with a pizza party and honored for "Perfect, Perfect," attendance, on time, and present every day since September 2013.

### Edward Williams Elementary School



Mayor Ernest Davis visited the first grade with gifts and in a gesture of gratitude the students presented him with a class-made gingerbread house.



### Graham Elementary School

Thank You to the "Back to School Clothes for Kids Organization" and their founder for providing clothing and books to sixteen students.



### Parker Elementary School

The asbestos-free classroom was repaired for young students to return before the holidays. Thank you to everyone for your patience and flexibility.

## DID YOU KNOW? IN 2014...

### JANUARY WAS NATIONAL THANK YOU MONTH



"In spite of my losses, which can never be replaced, I feel the love of my community, my high school, and every school in the district. I will never be able to repay you. I apologize for not being able to thank each and every one of you individually." **Reymundo Ureña** - Mount Vernon High School student and survivor of tragic family fire.

### OVER 67% OF SURVEYED STAFF SEE POSITIVE IMPROVEMENT

The results of the progress monitoring survey of staff showed that out of the 465 responses, 67 percent agreed that district-wide improvement efforts are going in the right direction.

### PARENTS CAN ACCESS RATINGS OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Parents and legal guardians of students enrolled in the Mount Vernon City School District may request the 2012-2013 APPR Composite Score for the 2013-2014 teachers and principals assigned to their children. Scores can only be requested in writing by completing and submitting a Teacher/Principal Composite Score Request Form. Request Forms and additional information for fulfilling requests can be found on [www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org).

### TRUSTEE BRENDA L. CRUMP EARNS AN ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Please share in our congratulations to Trustee Crump on behalf of the entire Board of Education and the New York School Boards Association for having earned the School Board U Recognition Program Board Achievement Award for completing two mandated courses and three personal choice leadership courses. This program is designed to recognize extensive time and effort for school board members who strive to continually expand their governance knowledge and skills. She also was featured in the New York State School Boards Association advertising campaign.

**SchoolBoardU**  
Learning for Leaders

[www.nyssba.org](http://www.nyssba.org)

### THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED WITH US

Refer to our website for direct links.  
[www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org)



#### FACEBOOK

District news, updates, and insights



#### HOME ACCESS CENTER

Student and parent information system



#### LIVESTREAM

Recordings of Board of Education events



#### INSTAGRAM

Snapshots of school community



#### YOUTUBE

Video highlights of achievements



#### EMAIL

[community@mtvernoncsd.org](mailto:community@mtvernoncsd.org)



#### CABLE PUBLIC ACCESS

FiOs®: Channel 33  
Time-Warner: Channel 6

### CALENDAR EVENTS Check [www.mtvernoncsd.org](http://www.mtvernoncsd.org) for details.



**Superintendent Candidate Interviews: Public Forum**  
March 12: 6pm - 11pm  
Holmes Elementary School  
195 North Columbus Avenue



**Special Education PTA Meets Every Third Thursday Monthly**  
March 20: 6:30pm  
Education Center  
165 North Columbus Avenue